

VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Testimony in Support of RB #1094, *An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs*

Chairs Currey, McCrory; Ranking Members Berthel, McCarty; Representative Brown and distinguished members of the Education Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about Raised Bill #1094, An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs. My name is Joseph Macary and I have been the Superintendent of Schools for the Town of Vernon for the past 8 years.

Vernon Public Schools never wavers from its district core beliefs: advocate a “whole child” approach to student learning, maximize student performance, by setting high expectations, and integrate family and community with the education system. In order to fulfill our core beliefs, the Vernon Public Schools has worked relentlessly on developing, implementing, and monitoring a comprehensive high-quality ELA curriculum that is specifically designed to meet the diverse learning needs of our students. Our curriculum writers, which include teachers, district coaches, central office administrators, and outside consultants, devised a curriculum to address the Connecticut Core Standards for English Language Arts comprehensively.

In order to address the standards, our curriculum model supports direct explicit instruction and authentic application in all areas of reading. Guided by the science of reading, our curriculum focuses on the main components that are fundamental to reading: oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, letter name fluency, and reading comprehension. To address these different components of reading our district utilizes scientifically-based programs that professional development, professional learning committees, and coaching support.

Since implementing this process, let our results for ELA student achievement be a considering factor...

Smarter Balanced Results in English Language Arts (ELA) Grades 3-8 Combined - *Percent Level 3 or Above*

District	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2021-22	% Change over 5 years (pre-Covid)
Vernon	40.8%	44.6%	49.7%	46.8%	53.3%	51.0%	+ 12.5%
CT Alliance Districts	40.5%	41.4%	40.0%	41.5%	42.0%	35.2%	+ 1.5%
State of CT	55.6%	55.6%	54.2%	55.3%	55.7%	49.1%	+ 0.1%

The Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.

We truly believe in the Science of Reading- phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension and strongly advocate that all students should be reading by the end of grade 1 and reading independently by the end of grade 3. That is how we are going to close the achievement gap in Connecticut.

To achieve that goal: we believe in a comprehensive literacy curriculum developed by experts. This curriculum would detail the goals, objectives, and strategies that students need to know and should be able to achieve at each grade level. ELA interventionists, reading teachers and trained tutors must be available for those children who are struggling in challenged districts. That should be the mandate funded by the State.

We do not believe in a ‘magic bullet’ or canned programs. To expect results from such an attempt is a fallacy and quite naïve. Commercial programs are not the magic bullet – if they were, districts would have been using them decades ago. These programs de-professionalize teachers and cannot be a “one size fits all”, in addition to costing millions of dollars of taxpayer money. Teach the child - not the program.

You have teachers on this committee – ask them? Do commercial programs best educate students?

The purpose of the original reading bill is good, the intent is great. Keep it. The problem lies with the implementation of the bill. You cannot sit here and say that “buying “ a certain reading program will solve our problems in Connecticut – that is foolish, and quite ridiculous. Successful implementation is needed to make this bill work and that takes effective leadership. Together, we need to lead an effort that will change CT not for next year but for the next decades to come, by making a difference in the lives of our children. Our students deserve that!

Please consider delaying the implementation of this bill, so that we can do it right!
Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Macary". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph P. Macary, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Town of Vernon, Connecticut